DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 369 263 FL 021 979

AUTHOR Reeves, Nigel
TITLE Bilingual Information Processing--Autonomous Learning and Cross-Cultural Negotiating--the European Monetary Union Project at Aston University.
PUB DATE 93
NOTE 10p.; Paper presented at the Institute of Language Education (Hong Kong, 1993).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Business Education; *Collective Bargaining; Economics; English; Foreign Countries; *German; Higher Education; Independent Study; Intercultural Communication; *International Trade; *Languages for Special Purposes; Language Skills; Monetary Systems; Program Descriptions; *Second Language Programs; Simulation
IDENTIFIERS *European Monetary Union

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the role that foreign language programs should play in targeting their instruction to the particular needs of students, whether they are studying business, science, or other technical fields. It also describes an English-German negotiation simulation for final year students in the International Business and German course at Aston University in Birmingham, England. Students are divided into four teams and conduct negotiations on various real-life topics related to British and German participation in the European Monetary Union (EMU). The four topics for the 1993-94 school year were: (1) The Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM); (2) the EMU as proposed in the Maastrict Treaty; (3) the role of the Federal German Bank; and (4) the significance of the ERM and EMU for British and German industrial interests. The teams analyze briefing materials in both English and German, prepare oral and written presentations in German, conduct negotiations in both English and German, and write reports on the outcomes in both English and German. Teams not participating in a given negotiation act as journalists and write simulated news reports of the proceedings for British and German newspapers. All oral presentations and negotiations are filmed for later review and critique. (MDM)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 369 263

Bilingual Information Processing - Autonomous Learning and Cross-Cultural Negotiating - the European Monetary Union Project at Aston University.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
N. B. B
REEVES
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

i) Introduction

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The project that I shall describe to you is based on two fundamental precepts: that all our teaching should have as one of its aims the satisfaction of the learner's needs and purpose for learning, and secondly that language learning is most effective when it occurs in and refers to contexts that are meaningful to the learner. It is easiest to fulfil those precepts when language teaching is provided in a professional or vocational setting, that is as post-experience teaching, as teaching which accompanies professional education or vocational training, or as an accompaniment, in higher education, to the study of a non-language subject to which the language syllabus can be related. Unfortunately, in all these areas it is still quite common for language courses to be offered that bear no relation to the learner's current or potential professional or vocational interests or needs. The approach I advocate does not preclude the possibility that the student's wish and need is to be acquainted with the literature of the target language and features of its high culture, and indeed seeks to foster the transferable skills of analysis, judgement, problem-solving and articulacy. I immediately acknowledge also that identifying the learner's needs is simpler in the context of professional or apprentice professional life than it is in a school setting. But I am convinced that the bottom line for effective language learning at any level or age is that the conceptual context should have sufficient relevance to the experience and accompanying learning of the student to stimulate commitment and intellectual curiosity.

These then are the precepts, and evidence to support them was adduced in a number of papers given in the 1992 Institute of Language in Education Conference *Language and Content*, of which I would highlight Bernard Mohan's contribution[1] and mention the work I and some associates had carried out, and on which I reported[2], investigating the efficacy of bilingual education in Europe. The thrust of my own paper was that pupils learning through a foreign language as the medium of instruction can gain as much subject

FL021979

[1] Bernard Mohan, 'A Common Agenda for Language and Content Integration' in *Language and Content* ed., N Bird, J Harris & M Ingham, ILE, Education Department Hong Kong, 1993, 4-19. Cp. also William Littlewood, 'Cognitive Principles underlying task-centred language learning', in *Language and Content*, cited above, 39-55.

[2] Nigel Reeves, 'The Foreign or Second Language as the Medium of Instruction: A Review of School-level Experience across Europe', in *Language and Content*, cited above, 99-112.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

knowledge and subject understanding as their peers who are learning that subject in the mother tongue while their progress in that foreign language is substantially more rapid than that of pupils who are learning it as a language in its own right.

I come now to the general aims of the Aston European Monetary Union project, which by implication, could or indeed should be the general aims of any language teaching that follows this philosophy.

ii) The Project Aims: Community of Practice and Discourse

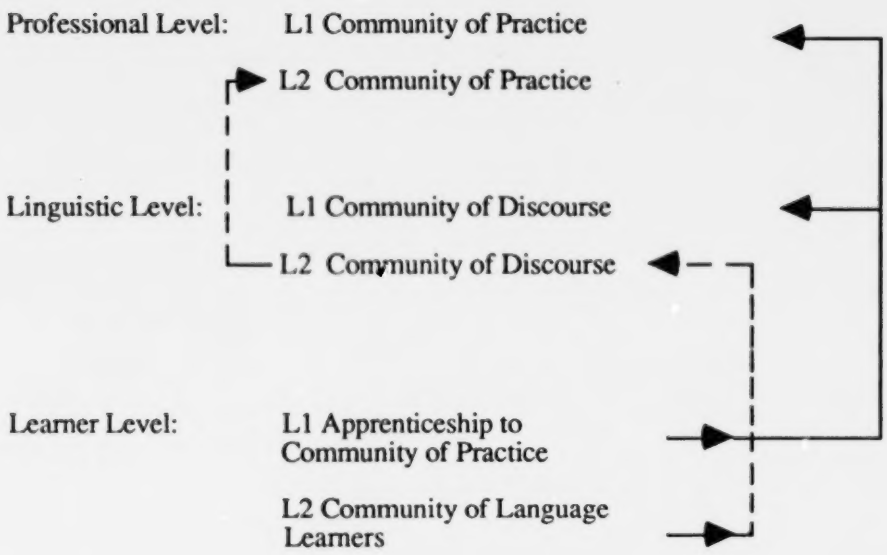
The superordinate aim is the induction of the learner to the L2 community of discourse which corresponds to the community of practice which he or she entering in the L1 country and culture. Community of practice is a term which has been used particularly pertinently by researchers in the Institute for Research on Learning at Palo Alto, California[3] who are investigating the cognitive processes involved in workplace/professional activity, that is , how participants in these activities and processes gain knowledge, learn to interact with others effectively within the conventions and practices of their group, and how the information necessary for their activities is transferred informally and formally between them.

From a linguist's point of view the learning that occurs in such a community together, of course, with the information transfer, underpins the characteristic discourse of that community, that is its terminology, and its genres. The community of discourse[4] can, in short, be the linguistic manifestation of a community of practice. As teachers taking seriously the current or eventual professional and vocational aims of the learner who intends to be operationally effective in an overseas community of practice, to act as an intermediary between an L1 community of practice and an L2 community of practice, or to work, as or may well be the case in Hong Kong, in a transnational community of practice, we need to familiarise that learner with the appropriate L2 discourse.

---

[3] See for example, John Seely Brown and Paul Duguid, 'Organisational Learning and Communities of Practice: towards a unified view of working, learning, and innovation', *Organisation Science* 2(1) Feb 1991, 40-57; Charlotte Linde, 'Reflections on Workplace Learning: Institute for Research Learning, 1992

[4] Cp. John Swales, *Genre Analysis. English in academic and research settings*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge etc, 1990, 23-32.



This diagram illustrates the progression for which we should aim from the student's membership of a language learning community and an apprentice L1 community of practice and its concomitant community of discourse to the L1 community of practice. But it is the induction to the L2 community of discourse which opens the door to entering the L2 community of practice.

This involves, naturally, an LSP approach, which has the immediate advantage of providing the learner with the conceptual scaffolding that will secure rapid progress in the L2, corresponding also to my second tenet that learning is most effective when carried out in a context that is meaningful and relevant to the learner. Familiarity with the subject matter through experience and study of the other discipline means that the underlying topography of the foreign language landscape is well-known. This builds confidence and reduces the number of unknowns facing the learner. At the same time the language learning reinforces conceptual knowledge.

A second benefit of concentrating on the L2 community of discourse is that it can cause us to reflect on the communicative practices in that community, how information is transferred and processed, decisions reached and promulgated, problems articulated and

solutions proposed. We can see chains of communication as the links that hold communities of practice together and enable them to act. Language learning project work, in contrast to more formal approaches based on exercises and work with isolated or decontextualised texts, enables us to simulate these chains of communication and escape from the artificial separation of skills that characterises most teaching and certainly testing[5]. For example, the artificial separation of skills testing in the UK National Vocational Qualifications in languages is, in my opinion, a very serious weakness.

But to be able to operate in an L2 community of practice requires more than knowledge of its discourse, and its communicative processes. It requires the ability to understand and to adapt to the cultural expectations and behavioural norms of that community and the wider professional and national culture within which is operates. This is an area of great difficulty at both an existential and an intellectual level. The values on which cultures rest are so deep-rooted, so much second nature that we rarely distance ourselves sufficiently from our own to be able to see ourselves as others, without those values, see us. Values are felt more than stated. We are hurt when others appear to trample on them but rarely make even our own, let alone those of other groups, objects of critical examination. Programmes that develop intercultural skills usually rely not on any explicit training but on the 'rub-off-effect', that is the intangible effect of reading L2 and culture 2 materials or at best spending a substantial period of residence in the target culture, where he or she experiences, through the socialisation process, a greater or lesser degree of acculturation.

Let me summarise. The precepts on which the project rest are that we have a duty to meet the needs of learners when they are to use the L2 outside the classroom and that secondly language learning is in any case most effective in contexts relevant to the learner's interests. The overriding aim is to introduce the learner to the equivalent L2 community of discourse that matches his/her own future or current community of practice in the target language community. To this end we should introduce the learner to the appropriate LSP terminology, registers and genres, and thirdly, accustom him/her to L2 work based on chains of communication characteristic of the community of practice discourse. Finally intercultural awareness, sensitivity and responsiveness also need to be fostered if the learner is to be effective in the other community.

---

5 For a typography of these chains of communication, or 'workplace activities' as they pertain in Hong Kong vocational settings and probably universally see Antonia Cooper, *Technical Institute Graduates. English in the Workplace*, Part I Research Report, Hong Kong Bank Language Development Fund/Institute of Language in Education, Hong Kong, March 1992, pp. 32, 33.

iii) The European Monetary Union (EMU) Project

The EMU project culminates in two simulated negotiations between groups representing British interests and German interests in respect of the proposal enshrined in the Maastricht Treaty of 1991 and ratified by all European Community countries by 1993, that the eleven individual European currencies should be absorbed by 1999 into one European currency. Such a process does not only involve the sacrifice of national pride and the economic token of a national identity (its currency) - it imposes a single norm of productive performance across twelve historically separate economies, which could have as profoundly negative effects on less efficient economies as happened to the East German economy after monetary union with West Germany. Yet it can also have the benefit of creating the world's most powerful and stable currency, able to replace the dollar as a global reserve currency.

The target group of learners are final year students in the International Business and German course at Aston University, who are taught jointly in the Aston Business School and by our Department of Modern Languages.

They have studied management and business for three years including a year in Germany studying at a Business School or working in a responsible managerial trainee post in German industry. They are studying International Finance and International Economics in their L1 alongside their German course. I provide at the beginning a dossier of materials on the key issues in German and in English, gathered over the last four years from journalistic and semi-specialist sources such as banks and pressure groups (e.g. the Bruges Group). The students form into four groups of eight and each group is given a key topic which it is to analyse and present in German to other groups a week later. They have to speed-read in class and identify that information relevant to their interest in the dossier, master the terminology and penetrate the relevant systems and the issues they raise. The four topics in 1993-94 were - the ERM, (the Exchange Rate Mechanism), the European Monetary Union as proposed in the Maastricht Treaty, the role of the Federal German Bank vis-à-vis its domestic duties and its European status; and the relative significance of the ERM and EMU for British and German industrial interests. The groups organise themselves to process this information, which is available in both languages; they discuss and reformulate and, outside the class, design their presentation which has to be in German, as if to a German speaking audience, delivered orally and using aids such as the OHP. Comments and questions are invited after each presentation and by this means all class participants gain an overview of the four key topics, and their associated concepts and terms in German. The groups finally prepare a written version on their own presentation in the form of an internal company memorandum.

At the next meeting the first preparations for the negotiations take place. There are two sets of negotiations. The first is between a group representing German industrial interests located in Britain (e.g. German subsidiaries) and a group representing the British Department of Trade and Industry, to whom the first has come to make representations about Britain's departure in 1992 from the Exchange Rate Mechanism and the commercial uncertainty this entails for their business. The second set of negotiations is between a group of British Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Department of Trade officials who go to Bonn to explain to counterpart German officials the UK's continued non-membership of the ERM and how this can tally with the UK ratification of the Maastricht Treaty which confirms the timetable for European Monetary Union by 1999.

The various topic groups stay together and choose one of the roles. Using the dossier materials and the results of their own research (conducted outside the classroom) each group prepares its own case and tries to foresee the counterarguments that will be raised. They prepare for themselves a briefing note in German, which I review. They also organise their presentation by selecting a chairperson and electing to assume individually the role of expert in an area relevant to the issue.

This part of the project requires not only an understanding of the monetary systems in English and in German, but insight into the view-point of the negotiating partner. It is this last factor which supplies a degree of intercultural training, by compelling the teams to change national perspective either by directly acting the role of the partner country's representative or through foreseeing their position for the sake of effective negotiation.

In two separate sessions the negotiations are then filmed in a studio, with the non-participant groups attending but this time playing a new role, that of invited journalists. The latter make notes of the negotiation and the arguments brought forward and write a report in English as if for *The Financial Times*. This activity accustoms the students to assuming yet a new perspective, a critical overview of the entire proceedings and both sides of the argument. It also entails some familiarity with the style and approach of this important newspaper, which is published incidentally in both London and Frankfurt.

The students are then issued with the video of their own negotiation. They treat this in two ways. They write a brief critique in German of their own group's performance in the negotiation. (This is of course artificial for those who played the part of British negotiators but I am anxious that all have the same amount of practice in writing German).

Secondly they write a full report in German on the issue of the UK's non-membership of the Exchange Rate Mechanism and the goal of European Monetary Union for the *Handelsblatt*, the German equivalent of the *Financial Times,* which again calls for revisiting the entire matter but from the perspective of the German finance community. Finally I return the three written outcomes with comments on the language, the style and the argumentation. The entire process lasts from the beginning of October to the end of January, involves nine contact hours and runs alongside another project, organised by a colleague.

The written outcomes are in summary:

1 Internal company memorandum (L2)

2 Negotiators' confidential briefing note (L2)

3 Report for *Financial Times* (L1)

4 Critical self-assessment (L2)

5 Full report on negotiations for *Handelsblatt* (L2)

These pieces of written work are elements in the three chains of communication entailed by the three component activities in the project: the topic presentation, the preparation and completion of the negotiation, and the journalist report.

For the topic presentation they analyse specialist written information in two languages, discuss in the L2 how they will present their topic, prepare presentation aids in the L2 such as overheads and handouts and then give their formal oral presentation with each member specialising in a particular sub-area. Finally the group prepares the written L2 memorandum (for internal company purposes). They then move from reading, to discussing with L2, through some writing to formal oral presentation and finally written summary. There is a clear tendency for the informal group discussions to lapse into English and to force a switch to the L2 and I play the role of a German speaking line manager who has come to ask about progress.

The second chain of communication is the heart of the project - the reading, analysis and discussion of the two-language dossier, the marshalling of arguments and counter-arguments according to the group's negotiating role and then the organisation of the group's approach. This is summarised in German in the confidential team briefing note.

Thus the students move from reading, to oral work, and to written work prior to the negotiation itself.

The formal negotiation consists of a prepared section presenting the group and its basic standpoint, usually stated by the chairperson, and followed by detailed points put forward by each of its 'experts' in turn. When both standpoints have been put forward, the exchange begins, with the designated experts on each side contributing when their specialist area is at issue. Spontaneity usually takes over, however, and there is often a quite heated exchange. Finally the chairpersons try to summarise the argument or outstanding points of disagreement. The whole process is videoed in a studio.

The two non-participating groups observe in the role of journalists who are to report on the debate for the *Financial Times*. For the participants, however, the chain ends with a later written assessment or debriefing note on the session for their team's own record. This is in German (artificially of course for the groups playing UK roles) and is based on a combination of recollection (and therefore self-distancing) and the video.

The newspaper reports represent a final chain of a different sort, involving listening, note-taking, analysis and a written outcome designed for public - though expert - consumption. Since the *Financial Times* should form a major current source of information for a European manager, modelling a written piece in this genre is a valuable exercise, while there are examples in the original dossier). Indeed the ambition of some of the students is to enter journalism.

The last newspaper report is intended as a more global assessment of the issues, beyond the immediacy of the negotiations, and is intended to close the circle with the initial topic presentation. The report is in the L2 for the *Handelsblatt*, the major German language business newspaper, which is represented in the dossier also. Here too the student moves from listening, watching and recollecting to analysis and writing.

All written work is returned by me with comments but the discussion of the two newspaper reports and the debriefing note constitutes the final two hours of the course. It takes place in German.

iv) Conclusion

What have we sought to achieve?

The students have become familiar with a major macro-economic issue which will affect them very profoundly in their careers whether directly in business in UK or Germany, in the UK or EC Civil Service, or in economic journalism. They have tackled the issue from both macro - and micro - economic perspectives and have looked at it from both UK and German points of view. They have learnt to operate with the appropriate specialist terms and concepts in both languages and to switch from one language to the other according to circumstances. This bilingual information processing characterises the work of those in transnational communities of practice or those who move professionally between such communities in different countries. They have, through their oral and written work, become more familiar with the L2 Community of Practice as a Community of Discourse. They have become a little more accustomed to the movement between analysing and representing information, deploying that information in debate, and utilising the mix of language skills which underlies the chains of workplace communication (or the chains of communication of the L2 Community of Discourse). Finally the repeated change of role and of perspective entailed in the negotiation and then the critical reports on those negotiations may have helped the students to acquire some of the flexibility, receptiveness, and perhaps self-knowledge that can form the basis of interculturality. Of course this is difficult and might work better if the class consisted of both British and German students. But this, like the artificiality at certain points of using German, is symptomatic of the problem we face in the classroom. It is not an authentic situation but simulation. Nonetheless the system and rigour that such a simulation can supply makes it a good preparation for authentic professional L2 encounters.

Professor N B R Reeves